

# STEVE JOBS AND NARENDRA MODI - INTERESTING SIMILARITIES AND LEADERSHIP LESSONS

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## ABSTRACT

*Steve Jobs and Narendra Modi are leaders from different walks of life. One worked in business and the other is working in politics. Steve Jobs is ranked as one of the greatest entrepreneurs of modern times. Modi currently has the highest approval rating than any other global leader. Jobs took out Apple from the difficult times and made it the most valuable company of the world. Modi too became Prime Minister when India was facing many challenges on different fronts.*

*Interesting similarities can be drawn from their lives. Both have humble beginnings. Passion, vision, talent management, style of working, marketing are some of the characteristics on which both appear strong. This paper takes a look at the leadership lessons one can draw from their working styles.*

**Keywords:** Leadership, Talent, Passion, Vision.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Interesting Similarities

Both Jobs and Modi had their childhood in a family which was not economically well off. Jobs was an adopted child and his father kept switching sources of his livelihood like fixing cars and also worked as a real estate broker. Jobs' mother did bookkeeping work during the family's financial crunch times. At one point of time when Jobs' fourth grade teacher asked students what was it that they didn't understand about the universe, Jobs asked "I don't understand why all of a sudden my dad is so broke?" In Modi's case also his mother did some domestic work in the neighborhood to raise her kids. Modi worked at his father's tea shop. Both leaders rose up from a very modest background.

In the early young life both tried to seek spiritual enlightenment. Jobs was a hippie and travelled to Himalayan region of India to meet a saint called *Neem Karoli Baba (Maharaj Ji)*. He didn't meet the saint and returned to America after spending 9 months travelling in India. Later Jobs became follower of Zen Buddhism and also wanted to turn monk only to be told by his master that he could continue working in the field of business and there was no need of turning monk for spiritual awakening. In Modi's case, he left his house for travelling across India. Modi spent 2 years in Himalaya. Modi too wanted to turn *sanyasi* and stayed in Belur *Mutt* of Ramkrishna Mission. Modi too was told by a *saint* that it wasn't necessary to turn *sanyasi* and he could serve country in different way too.

Both Jobs and Modi have been criticized for abandoning women in their lives. In Jobs case things went a little too far, as Jobs denied paternity of girl child from his girlfriend. He settled the dispute out of court accepting the paternity to avoid any controversy just before Apple went public. In Modi's case, he got engaged at the age of 13 and got married by the time he was 18. Soon after marriage he left his house. Although he never denied overtly that he was married, he kept his marital status column blank while filing nominations for the assembly elections. It was the Supreme Court decision that candidates cannot leave columns blank, for the first time Modi wrote name of his wife while filing nomination for Lok Sabha election and accepted publically that he was married.

Their association with Japan is another similarity that can be found. Jobs travelled to Japan in early stages of his carrier for business purposes. His bond only grew as he became follower of Zen Buddhism. Kyoto was Jobs' one of favorite places where he took even his kids for visits. Jobs drew lot of inspiration from Japanese companies, especially Sony. In Modi's case too, he has visited Japan when he was the chief minister of Gujarat. When Modi became Prime Minister only 3 accounts that Prime Minister Japan Abe Shinzo followed on Twitter, one was of Modi. Modi's dream project of bullet train is especially the one which has said to be inspired from Japan. There is also an agreement which Modi and Abe signed for Kashi and Kyoto. No wonder some of the first major foreign visits Modi planned Japan topped the list.

Both have their signature dressing style with Jobs with his black turtle neck and blue jeans and Modi with his own styled *Kurta*. Their dressing styles are based on their own personal beliefs. Jobs considered himself as a rebel and against the corporate dress code he had his own informal style of dressing. Modi believes in 100% *desi* culture which can be seen in his dressing in Indian way.

Jobs' toughest time in life was those ten years when he was away from Apple. He started his second company NeXT and bought an animation studio Pixar. The troubling times with both adventures made Jobs a mature entrepreneur and Jobs attribute success in later part of his life to these challenging ten years. Modi's toughest times were his twelve years which he spent as Gujarat Chief Minister. 2002 Gujarat riots made Modi point of bitter criticism from his opponents and national as well as international media. He had to undergo intense investigation by SIT set up by the Supreme Court of India. Simultaneously he continued his development work in a state which was destroyed by earthquake and communal riots. Exactly this twelve year hardship gave Modi Prime Ministerial candidature and later the post.

***Here is the look at some of the similarities and lessons one can draw from their working lives.***

**Have Passion for Work:** Both leaders can be found working relentlessly in their respective fields. Jobs could harmlessly ring up somebody at 2 in the night to discuss an idea that struck him at an odd hour. He could tirelessly work on weekends and expected the same dedication from his employees. Modi too campaigned tirelessly during elections addressing rallies after rallies. Modi is found to be working like a machine putting almost 18 hours a day.

The reason behind such passion can only be traced in the fact that both chose a field to work in which they really enjoyed and loved.

**Have your Own Style:** Both Jobs and Modi can be found to be hard task masters. Both can be found to be firm and may appear adamant to their critics. Jobs managed to create one of the finest organizations of the world believing on his gut feelings and without any formal management education. Jobs admired Walt Disney, Henry Ford and many other entrepreneurs. But he never tried to imitate or copy anybody's style. Modi too can be seen admiring many of leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee from his own party. But there has been no imitation to be like him.

Jobs believed in simplicity and once tossed down a contract of 125 pages with IBM without even reading it and asked for contract with fewer pages. Modi too has demanded conciseness and simplicity in the presentations to be made to him.

*You do your best being you own.*

**Be a Great Talent Finder:** However a genius human being, he cannot do all the things himself. Success lies in picking up right people for right task. Jobs himself was a college drop out. He never hired people based on their educational background. During interviews he only asked candidates what they could offer to the organization and evaluated whether candidate could fit in Apple culture. Jobs was able to create a team of his trusted and amazingly talented lieutenants like Tim Cook, Johny Ive.

In Modi's case, many had doubts when Modi made Amit Shah the campaign manager for the state of Uttar Pradesh in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. But the historic win in Uttar Pradesh can only confirm that only Modi could know what Amit Shah was capable of. Dr. S. Jaishankar, India's current foreign minister will stand out as Modi's unique find given the fact Dr. Jaishankar has no political background and but as a government employee worked in the external affairs ministry. His selection of chief ministers of different BJP led states too raised many eye brows as criterion like dominating caste of the state was not considered on many occasion. Both leaders have no-nonsense attitude for non-performers who were later shown door.

*Be good talent finder. Talent management is the key.*

**Do not listen to "Experts":** When it to critics both Jobs and Modi have stumped so called 'experts'. iPod was criticized heavily for being overpriced. Jobs was warned that he was heading for a massive failure and financial blunder when he decided to start Apple's retail chain, Apple Stores. After iPad was unveiled even Bill Gates dismissed it saying, "There's nothing on the iPad I look at and say, 'Oh, I wish Microsoft had done it.'" Jobs was not only able to create innovate products but with their massive sales he made Apple most valued company in terms of its share value.

Modi is one those rare Indian politician who became politically untouchable due to intense and relentless media criticism and perception that got created. His critics kept predicting he wouldn't be able to win Gujarat assembly elections, his party wouldn't announce him as PM candidate, he wouldn't be able to get majority, he wouldn't be able to have allies, he wouldn't be able to get reelected. Every prediction proved wrong with the passage of time.

*Know what people want, trust instincts. Experts later fall in line.*

**Rally Troops against Common Enemy:** Jobs always rallied his employees and Apple followers against one competitor. In early Apple days it was IBM. Later it was Microsoft, Dell and Google's Android. Jobs kept pointing what problems competitors products had and aggressively went after his competitors. This way he galvanized his employees who at times were demotivated.

In Modi's case he almost made a showdown appear as 'him versus the rest'. He made full frontal attack on Gandhi family and called rest of the other parties just allies in disguise of the Congress party. However things do not stop by criticizing others. You have to offer solutions; both for long term and short term. What truly inspires your followers is setting a grand vision. Jobs talked about "What we're doing here will send a giant ripple through the universe". Modi talks about restoring India to its earlier position of being *Jagadguru (Guide for the world)*.

*It's important to offer solutions while pointing problems.*

**Marketing Matters:** Jobs was called as perhaps the only CEO on the globe who paid such meticulous attention to marketing. He personally finalized every billboard, print and TV ad for Apple in his Wednesday meetings. Apple's "1984" Macintosh advertisement and "Think Different" campaign are considered to be the best of all time in the field of marketing. Jobs was very good at media management and created buzz for Apple products by planning exclusive interviews. In the process, Jobs not only made Apple a well known brand but he himself became a brand. Jobs kept a close watch on what was written about him in newspapers and blogosphere and didn't hesitate to personally respond to something which he found extremely annoying. He remained accessible to common Apple customers with the email ID and enjoyed reading their every emails.

In Modi's case even his opponents agree that Modi is very good at marketing. He was among the first Indian politicians to have his account on social networking sites and made full use of it in spreading his Gujarat work. 2014 Lok Sabha election in fact is the testimony of Modi's marketing brain. Ad campaigns like "*Achhe Din Aanevale Hain*", "*Ab ki Baar Modi Sarkar*", "*Main Bhi Chowkidar*" which ran on radio, newspapers, TV and Internet, vast campaigning through 400+ rallies, gave Modi maximum reach to voters. 3D rallies, Mission 272+ portal are some of the innovations that Indian elections saw for the first time. Breaking the hostility that got created between media and him, Modi gave series of interviews to Hindi and regional channels, making sure that his face remained on TV during election times. He was able to make 'Brand Modi' that almost overshadowed the brand of his party. Modi too keep a close watch on what is being written about him and has been found to be replying to criticism through his public rallies. Modi too has kept himself accessible through social media accounts and many commoners have written about how they felt surprised to receive message from Modi or his office.

Jobs was an excellent communicator. His product launch speeches left audience spell-bound. Modi's rallies too attract huge number of crowd. Both are known for secrecy in the work. Jobs was so particular about it that he fired employees who were found to be leaking news to the media. Modi's decision of selection ministers, his strategic moves like demonetization, surgical strikes remained strictly guarded with secrecy. Excellent communicators and event managers are some other points that can be found similar between them.

Keep in mind, "*Your book is judged by its cover too.*" Try to create best impression through marketing.

**Focus on Product:** No amount of publicity or marketing can save a dull product from failure and this fact has to be kept in mind while spending for marketing. Jobs worked relentlessly on making 'insanely great' products. He kept working and reworking on products till the time he found them nothing but perfect. Modi's Gujarat work too has its own ground. If somebody claims that Modi won because of sheer marketing, that would be totally wrong. After all he won Gujarat elections not one but for three consecutive times and came back in 2019 with more number of seats than earlier. You cannot fool people all the time. How less or more perfect the work is, one can keep arguing but nobody can deny that he has worked.

Substance in product is important. Marketing can only work for such a product.

**When on back Foot Retreat:** When the iPhone 4 was released in June 2010 and the problem surfaced when the user held the phone a certain way, especially using left hand where the palm covered the tiny gap, the phone lost signals. But since it was an Apple product, it started making headlines and soon it became known as “Antennagate”. Initially Jobs refused to take note of the problem calling it a mischief by Google and Motorola. But when things became noisy, Jobs himself addressed the media and accepted the problem. He said, “We’re not perfect. Phones are not perfect. We all know that. But we want to make our users happy.” He gave a different dimension to the whole discussion saying that all cell phones had some problems. The whole attention then shifted to all other smart phones which were in the market at that time.

Modi has repealed 3 farm laws. There were protests by farmers. It led to agitation by the farmers on the outskirts of the national capital and the agitation is still going. With his announcement of repeal of the laws, now the focus has shifted back to agitating farmers and what they will do next.

It is important to address the problem when the noise grows rather than living in denial. Address the problem and move on.

**See Things Beyond Money:** Although Jobs had an airplane and yacht, he decided to have them because he wanted comfort of travelling with family. Jobs never allowed money or wealth to become his identity. He lived in a small and barely furnished house. He once said, “Being known as the richest man in the cemetery doesn’t matter to me. Going to bed at night as we have done something wonderful that’s what matters to me.” Unlike many politicians Modi has been able to keep himself away from any financial scam. He lives unostentatious life with minimum materialistic belongings.

Your legacy can’t be created with expensively built bungalows or owning fleet of imported cars. Keep working. Don’t run behind money and then money will run behind you.

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